

We All Have a Vital Role in Safety

Prompt and accurate communication is key for all parties involved in resolving an incident. **Remember:** If you are reporting on the scene at an incident, seek out the Incident Commander or Public Information Officer. This will avoid misinformation and confusion.

As citizens, we all have a responsibility to properly handle chemicals to prevent accidents in the home. Chemicals have many benefits to our society. We rely on chemicals in almost every facet of our lives including medicines, cosmetics, household cleaners, automotive products, paints, pesticides and fertilizers. However, if chemicals are mishandled, they can pose a risk to health, safety, and the environment. Whether chemical accidents occur at home, at work or on the highway, we all have a responsibility to properly use, store, and dispose/recycle of chemicals to preserve our environment and well being.

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EDUCATIONAL
FOUNDATION**

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About the Chemical Educational Foundation®...

The Chemical Educational Foundation® (CEF) is a non-profit organization that serves the public and the allied chemical industry by promoting chemical safety and the protection of the environment through educational programs, publications, and videos. Many of the Foundation's publications are free.

Product Stewardship Bulletin No. 22

The News Media's Vital Role in Chemical Emergency Planning and Response



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*Dedicated to Product Stewardship-
The Responsible Management of Chemicals*



Photos: Detrick Lawrence

The News Media — Your Role

When an emergency happens in any community, the news media is usually the public's first source of information. Rapid communication of accurate information can make a difference. Understanding and disseminating critical emergency instructions to the public is often the most important, and sometimes the most difficult, aspect of emergency response.

In some cases, emergency responders are faced with the complexities of evacuating the public or calling for residents to shelter-in-place. No matter what the situation — weather alerts, fire, or chemical release — emergency broadcast systems and live reports from media on the scene can be used to ensure that the public is sufficiently informed about what they must do to protect themselves, plus where to go in an evacuation.

In emergency situations, radio and television personnel are invaluable partners in helping to minimize confusion, rumor, and misinformation, but they must also be active participants in the planning process.

Benefits of the Media's Involvement in Emergency Planning

Prompt and accurate communication, as most emergency responders will agree, is an important key to effective response. Communication between members of one response team, between different teams, among various public service agencies, and, especially, with residents are all important to a successful response to an emergency situation.

Public safety efforts, even on a daily basis, depend on the accurate and dependable transfer of information between parties. It has been well documented that a good emergency plan, which is well understood by all stakeholders, will help protect the public from harm. An emergency plan will only be effective if communication concerns are thoroughly addressed and executed.

Most county governments in the United States have formed emergency planning groups known as Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPCs). There is also typically a state and/or local agency responsible for crisis planning and management. In addition,



tion, one or more fire and police departments service almost every community. A variety of representatives serve on LEPCs including chemical employees, police officers, firefighters, educators, hospital representatives, etc. LEPCs and state planning groups may recruit media representatives to serve as members because they recognize that the media can provide an important link with people who live and work in the community.

To find out more about these groups go to www.chemed.org/publicat/Bulletins/stew15/stew15.html

To locate an LEPC in your area, go to EPA's database at www.epa.gov/ceppo/lepclist.htm. If you do not see an LEPC in your area, check the white pages under government listings/emergencies to find your state or local emergency management agency, or call the county public safety official.

Media representatives who work on planning committees gain knowledge of the emergency response systems. This know-how enables them to more fully inform the community. The more accurate and complete the information is, the more likely that injuries will be prevented.

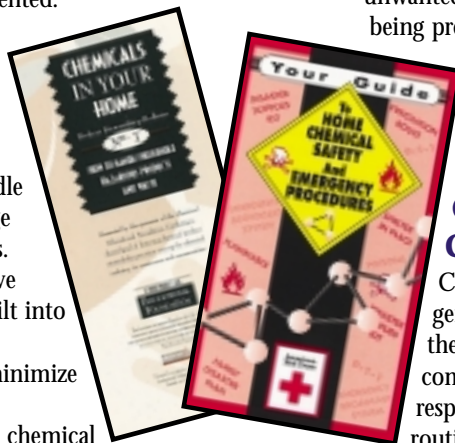
Preventing Chemical Accidents

Chemical companies have a responsibility to properly handle chemicals and to safely manage risks associated with chemicals. Many chemical companies have chemical safety procedures built into their daily operations to prevent accidents and minimize the impact of accidents.

In the mid-80's, two chemical associations initiated Responsible Care® in Canada and the U.S. for their chemical manufacturing members. Now Responsible Care® has been adopted throughout Europe as well.

In the early 1990s, two chemical distributor associations in Canada and the U.S. adopted Responsible Distribution® and the Responsible Distribution ProcessSM (RDP), respectively, for their members.

These initiatives were designed to protect the environment, as well as the health and safety of the public, customers, and their employees. For more information on the Responsible Care® in the U.S., go to www.americanchemistry.com and in Canada www.ccpa.ca/. For more information on the Responsible Distribution ProcessSM in the U.S. go to www.nacd.com and Responsible Distribution® in Canada www.cacd.ca/.



Our Responsibility

All citizens have a responsibility to handle chemicals safely. Even though most people usually don't think about it, all of us use chemicals every day—household cleaners, medicines, cosmetics, paints, motor oils, fertilizers and pesticides—to improve our quality of life. According to the American Red Cross, the most common chemical accidents occur in our homes. Knowing how to properly use, store, and dispose of chemical products is important to prevent accidents in the home. For more information on chemical safety and emergency procedures go to

<http://www.redcross.org/disaster/safety/chemical.html>.

For more information on chemicals in your home go to <http://www.chemed.org/pubs.htm> and scroll down to Bulletin No. 7.

Even though many steps can be taken to prevent incidents involving chemicals, there is always the possibility that an unwanted event will occur. Whether in the home or at work, being prepared for these events includes the need to communicate promptly and accurately. This is why it is so important to plan for chemical emergencies so we can be prepared to properly respond quickly, safely, and efficiently.

Chemical Emergencies: Contacting the Incident Commander

Chemical emergencies pose unique concerns for emergency responders. Not only do they represent some of the more

common hazards responders face

(fire, traffic jams, physical injury), but they also present potential chemical exposures. Because of the potential for hazardous material contact, responders serving on HazMat teams receive special training to enable them to make good decisions during actual incidents.

For all chemical emergencies there will be an Incident Commander (IC) who is in charge of the incident and may delegate media briefings to the Public Information Officer (PIO). A chemical facility may also have a Public Information Officer, and any media briefings should be coordinated through the IC or PIO.

A chemical spill during transportation is the most common reason that a HazMat team is put into action. Fixed facility



incidents are less common, but not less hazardous. Therefore, manufacturers, distributors, transporters, and users of hazardous materials are all actively involved in prevention, planning, and preparedness activities.

Transportation incidents, in particular, should involve the media to let travelers know of alternate routes or other specific instructions to avoid the area. This advance notice can protect additional people from potential exposure to a hazardous material. Even though a responder's first action will be to try to contain the material, there is still the chance that persons who are not properly protected could be exposed. Because of this possibility, it is important to understand how to shelter-in-place.

Communicating Shelter-in-Place

Because chemicals that are airborne can be moved quickly by the wind, emergency planning experts have often recommended sheltering-in-place in lieu of or prior to evacuation. Sheltering-in-place involves making the area you are in, whether it is a building or a vehicle, safe for you to stay until further instructions are given, or the emergency is under control.

Sheltering-in-place instructions can be given over the radio or television to allow people to protect themselves. If you are reporting on the scene of an incident, remember to follow these instructions to protect yourself.

Shelter-in-Place

1. Get inside a car or go inside a building.
2. Close all doors and windows.
3. Turn off air conditioning or heating units that draw air in from outside.
4. Turn on the emergency broadcast station in your area.
5. Gather all important items that you must have if an evacuation is started, e.g. medicine, baby items, money and identification.
6. Prepare to move your children and pets if an evacuation is required.
7. Listen carefully to the radio or television for further instructions. Evacuation often involves door-to-door notification, so watch and listen for police or fire personnel.